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Viewing cable 08TBILISI1341, GEORGIA: SOUTH OSSETIA SITREP 2: GEORGIA CLAIMS

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08TBILISI1341**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08TBILISI1341	2008-08-08 10:05	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Tbilisi

Appears in these articles:

http://rusrep.ru/article/2010/11/29/wikileaks_docs_02/

VZCZCXRO6349
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #1341/01 2211005
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 081005Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9864
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001341

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/08/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: SOUTH OSSETIA SITREP 2: GEORGIA CLAIMS
TO CONTROL MUCH OF SOUTH OSSETIA, FIGHTING CONTINUES

REF: TBILISI 1337

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Saakashvili in an August 8 conversation with the Ambassador, and Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili in a briefing to the diplomatic corps, claimed

that Georgia now controlled most of South Ossetia, including Tskhinvali, although fighting was continuing near the northern town of Dzhava. They also reported that Russian aircraft had dropped bombs on several targets in Georgia, outside of the conflict zone, at two locations in the center of Gori and dropped ordnance on a radar installation near Gori and a police station in Kareli. There are unconfirmed Georgian claims that they downed a Russian aircraft; in a statement, the Russian MFA denied this. Fighting had continued throughout the night of August 7, resuming four hours after President Saakashvili unilaterally declared a cease-fire at 1900. In a second address August 8, he called on the international community to help repel this "open Russian aggression" and announced a general mobilization of reserves. Meanwhile, Russian statements have accused the Georgians of targeting Russian peacekeepers; the Georgians argue that the South Ossetians are firing on the Russian peacekeepers as a provocation. The Georgians have announced that a safe corridor and ceasefire will be established from 3 to 6 pm local time for all civilians interested in leaving Tskhinvali to do so. During the night of August 8, four short range ballistic missiles were fired from within Russia toward Tskhinvali.

¶2. (C) We understand that at this point the Georgians control 75 percent of Tskhinvali and 11 villages around it. Journalists report that Georgian forces are moving toward the Roki tunnel. That road has been cratered by Georgian aircraft to make it difficult. We are told fighting continues with Russian fighters north of Tskhinvali; it is not clear if they are regular army or North Caucasian irregulars. Saakashvili has said that Georgia had no intention of getting into this fight, but was provoked by the South Ossetians and had to respond to protect Georgian citizens and territory. Meanwhile, the Georgian National Security Council (NSC) has formally requested 1,000 of its combat troops in Iraq be returned to Georgia within 72 hours. End Summary.

¶3. (C) Comment: All the evidence available to the country team supports Saakashvili's statement that this fight was not Georgia's original intention. Key Georgian officials who would have had responsibility for an attack on South Ossetia have been on leave, and the Georgians only began mobilizing August 7 once the attack was well underway. As late as 2230 last night Georgian MOD and MFA officials were still hopeful that the unilateral cease-fire announced by President Saakashvili would hold. Only when the South Ossetians opened up with artillery on Georgian villages, did the offensive to take Tskhinvali begin. Post has eyes on the ground at the Ministry of Interior command post in Tbilisi and will continue to provide updates. The Embassy held an EAC and will hold another to reassess the situation by COB. We have issued a warden message and are looking at the situation very carefully. If the Georgians are right, and the fighting is mainly over, the real unknown is what the Russian role will be and whether there is potential for the conflict to expand. End comment.

Current Situation

¶4. (C) Saakashvili, who told the Ambassador that he was in Gori when a Russian bomb fell in the city center, confirmed that the Georgians had not decided to move ahead until the shelling intensified and the Russians were seen to be amassing forces on the northern side of the Roki Tunnel. He said that the Georgian military action had been successful, Tskhinvali was mainly under Georgian control and that reservists would be brought in to defend the city while armed forces were moved further north to continue the fighting. According to Saakashvili, the EU was sending in Carl Bildt and the Lithuanian Foreign Minister to Tbilisi. Although most in the Georgian government believed that the fighting had started as a ploy of de facto leader Kokoity, Saakashvili was now concerned that this might have been a Russian pretext and a further attack could be expected. The Foreign Minister briefed the diplomatic corps on the situation, noting that

"all red lines had been crossed," but expressing hope that negotiations could take place and noting that a full amnesty would be offered to anyone involved in the fighting. She called on the international community to put pressure on the Russian Government to take no action.

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¶ 15. (C) The battle in South Ossetia took place throughout the night of August 7. During the night, four short range ballistic missiles were fired from within Russia toward Tskhinvali. On August 8, Russian aircraft flew into Georgian airspace in central Georgia and dropped ordnance on a radar installation near Gori and a police station in Kareli. Post understands that at this point the Georgians control 75 percent of Tskhinvali and 11 villages around it. Journalists report that Georgian forces are moving toward the Roki tunnel. That road has been cratered by Georgian aircraft to make it difficult to navigate with vehicles. We are told fighting continues with Russian fighters north of Tskhinvali. It is not clear if they are regular army or North Caucasian irregulars, as an MOIA spokesman said that approximately 1500 uniformed, unidentified forces with tanks and artillery entered South Ossetia via the Roki tunnel on August 8 at 10200. Reports indicate many casualties, but none are reliably accurate. State Minister of Conflict Settlement and Reintegration Temuri Yakobashvili said again on August 8 that Georgia will grant amnesty to all Ossetian fighters.

Chronology of Events

¶ 16. (C) On August 7 at 1925 Yakobashvili returned from the conflict zone and the Ambassador that the South Ossetians continued to shoot at the Georgian villages despite the announcement of the cease-fire. Yakobashvili said that he waited with General Kulakhmetov, the Head of the Russian peacekeepers in Tskhinvali for some time for the South Ossetians to show up. Kulakhmetov tried to call Chochiev, and other South Ossetians to get them together with Yakobashvili, but they did not respond. Kulakhmetov said, he "does not control anything" and that the South Ossetians were "shooting at the Georgians behind my back." Yakobashvili said that the Russians originally agreed to host a bilateral meeting with the Ossetians and the Georgians outside the JCC. Popov came to Georgia for this purpose and announced publicly it was his intention to do so. Then, the Russians flipped and said the meeting should be under the JCC. Yakobashvili said it was the JCC system that had caused the mess and it was time for real face to face talks.

¶ 17. (C) OSCE observers on the ground in Tskhinvali told Poloff that Georgia's attack on Tskhinvali began at 2335 on August 7 despite the cease-fire declared at 1900. The shelling intensified at 2345, with the Georgians possibly using large caliber mortars and GRAD artillery, with impacts every 15-20 seconds, and the South Ossetians returning fire. By observers' calculations, by 0035 there were at least 100 hits on the city of Tskhinvali, some of them damaging the OSCE field office there. Currently, the OSCE has electricity, but part of the building has sustained damage and the internet is down. There was a lull in the activity between 0145 and 0415, when the situation began to re-intensify, and by 0615 loud explosions could be heard. The number of casualties are unknown as emergency services are unable to move freely on the ground due to firing. Most local residents are confined to cellars and basements waiting for calm to return.

¶ 18. (C) At approximately 0400 on August 8, the Georgian National Security Council asked the U.S. for the return of 1,000 of its troops from Iraq, 500 within the next 24 hours, and the remainder within 48 hours. A regularly scheduled rotator flight may return up to 250 troops to Georgia by this afternoon. (Note: USG agreement with the GOG provides for emergency return of 1,000 troops within 96 hours. End note.) Later, Saakashvili announced a general mobilization of all reserves. In a second address, he called Russia's actions "open aggression" and called on the international community

to help repel it.

¶ 9. (C) Conversely, the Russians have said they believe Georgian forces are targeting Russian peacekeepers. They have told the Georgians that in view of these attacks Georgia bears responsibility for anything that might follow. The Georgians have replied that they are avoiding any conflict with the peacekeepers as well as civilians. The Georgians believe the South Ossetians are targeting the Russians to provoke a bigger Georgian-Russian conflict.

¶ 10. (C) The South Ossetians are reportedly now accusing the Russians of betraying them. One plausible explanation for all this is that de facto leader Kokoity decided to roll the dice and stimulate a conflict with the Georgians in hopes of bringing in the Russians and thereby saving himself or enhancing his position. Reports that Kokoity has left Tskhinvali remain unconfirmed.

TEFFT